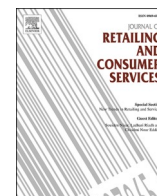




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Street harassment is marketplace discrimination: The impact of street harassment on young female consumers' marketplace experiences

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ABSTRACT

This study brings street harassment to the retailing and consumer services literature streams. Street harassment describes unwanted interactions in public spaces between strangers or customers and is often motivated by a person's gender, sexual orientation, or gender expression. To date, marketers have overlooked the occurrence of street harassment in retail establishments and consumer service domains, such as in theaters, public markets, recreational areas, and shopping malls. This work empirically demonstrates the extent to which young women in Nepal experience harassment from men in the marketplace and the various tactics they employ to lessen it. Furthermore, this research exposes the extent to which Nepali men admit to participating in verbal, physical, or visual harassment of women in various retailing and service settings. The article concludes with a discussion of theoretical, managerial, and societal implications and encourages public policy officials to treat street harassment as a criminal offense.

1. Introduction

1.1. Impact of other customers on service experiences

Nearly a quarter century ago, Grove and Fisk (1997) suggested that service encounters typically transpire in the presence of other customers, and the effects of other customers on service experience are equally likely to be positive or negative. Since then, other researchers have further found that, although the co-presence of customers in service settings may be positive, managers are often unable to control the negative impact of customers on a service experience and that customers often assign responsibility of both the positive and undesirable effects of other customers to management (Colm et al., 2017).

To date, many customer-to-customer studies have shown that negative service experiences are often benign intrusions or interruptions that often transpire when customers have to wait in queues together, converse with language difficulties, or when they have to share space with small children. However, sometimes, customer-to-customer incivility may also result in physical harm, or even death, (Fombelle et al.,

2019). In the following sections, this paper turns its attention to exploring customer-to-customer incivility that transpires in under-researched settings, i.e. public service settings. Additionally, rather than merely expose the existence of customer-to-customer incivility and discuss its impact on a customer's experience, we explore why the perpetrators of violence do so. First, we discuss the positive effects of customer-to-customer interactions on one's service experience and then we explore the negative effects of interactions that transpire in public service settings, or street harassment.

1.2. Understanding marketplace discrimination

Researchers have long espoused that interactions between and among customers in commercial (e.g., restaurants, cafés, fitness clubs; Alexander, 2019; Rosenbaum, 2006), leisure (e.g., seniors' clubs; Meshram and O'Cass, 2013), non-profit (e.g., cancer resource centers; Glover and Parry, 2019), and virtual (e.g., online support groups, social media sites, online brand communities; Yahia et al., 2018; Yao et al., 2015; Zhu et al., 2016) settings positively influence their experiences in

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these settings (Nicholls, 2010; Temerak et al., 2018). Researchers have also suggested that customer-to-customer (C2C) interactions may transform human well-being, as customers may obtain social supportive resources from other customers, replacing support from family and friends they often lose after experiencing negative life events (e.g., bereavement, divorce, retirement, empty-nest) (Adelman and Ahuvia, 1995; Black et al., 2014; Finlay et al., 2019; Rosenbaum et al., 2007).

On the one hand, positive C2C interactions often enhance customers' experiences in retailing and service settings to the extent that customers often seek out and patronize places that help them engage in social interactions with others, including customers and employees (Lucia-Palacios et al., 2018; Song et al., 2018). On the other hand, some C2C interactions may negatively affect customers' marketplace experiences (Martin, 2016; Nicholls and Mohsen, 2019). That is, consumers who enter marketplaces with certain disadvantages or vulnerabilities, such as those with disabilities, women, obese consumers, ethnic minorities, low-income consumers, and LGBTQ consumers, often report experiencing discrimination in retail environments from other customers or employees (Fisk et al., 2018; Reynoso and Cabrera, 2019; Rosenbaum et al., 2013; Sanchez-Barrios et al., 2015). In some instances, other customers may even physically attack or murder other customers who belong to stigmatized groups, as typified by the brutal assault of American student Matthew Shepard, who was beaten, tortured, and eventually killed by two patrons of a local bar in Wyoming (Noelle, 2002).

Other consumers may personally encounter or observe negative experiences in the marketplace from interacting with customers who display territorial behavior, such as when they claim chairs and tables in coffeeshops, pool areas, or airports (Griffiths and Gilly, 2012) or engage in aggressive behavior during major retailer promotional events, such as Black Friday (Smith and Raymen, 2017). Many mall shoppers around the world report experiencing discomfort from fear of violence or other potential conflicts that may arise among shoppers from religious or nationalistic differences (Ceccato and Tcacencu, 2018; Shtern, 2016).

Although many consumers residing in industrialized countries have a history of experiencing exclusionary practices or violence in retailing and consumer service domains (Edwards et al., 2018; Fisk et al., 2018), such occurrences remain noteworthy anomalies. Consumers, especially those with vulnerabilities or other disadvantages, do not consistently experience negative service encounters, as most corporate organizational policies and government legislation generally support consumer welfare and inclusionary marketplace practices (Baker et al., 2005).

1.3. Street harassment as a type of marketplace discrimination

Outside industrialized countries, unfair service systems and exclusionary practices characterize many consumers' experiences in retail and service establishments (Fisk et al., 2018). For example, women living in developing countries often encounter street harassment when entering public places, such as shopping areas and markets (Adur and Jha, 2018). Street harassment "describes unwanted interaction in public spaces between strangers that are motivated by a person's actual or perceived gender, sexual orientation, or gender expression, and make the harasser feel annoyed, angry, humiliated, or scared" (Kearl, 2014, p. 5). However, the term "street harassment" implies harassment transpiring in public spaces while inadvertently minimizing harassment occurring in retailing and service settings; that is, marketplace settings in which a large number of strangers congregate in spatially enclosed areas (e.g., shopping malls, movie theaters, buses, temples) or areas in which harassers remain mobile (e.g., parks, beaches, recreational areas) are often "convenient hunting ground[s] for harassers" (Hutson and Krueger, 2019, p. 773).

Although service researchers have explored the concept of tourist harassment and its negative impact on tourists' attitudes and behaviors (Alrawadieh et al., 2019), investigations into harassment that female consumers often experience in the marketplace are essentially

non-existent in the marketing literature. Furthermore, although social scientists and gender researchers have explored the concept of street harassment (Kearl, 2010, 2014; Vera-Gray, 2016), it remains one of the most under-studied but commonly experienced forms of violence against women. According to UN Women (n.d.), "although violence in the private domain is now widely recognized as a human rights violation, violence against women and girls, especially sexual harassment in public spaces, remains a largely neglected issue, with few laws or policies in place to prevent and address it."

When considered from the perspective of service research, consumers may experience harassment in three types of service settings. We identify the first type as privately owned settings, such as shopping malls, lifestyle centers (retail, hospitality, and food/beverage outlets), and medical offices. The second type is public service settings, such as sidewalks, streets, parks, natural areas, and urban green spaces. The third type is mixed-space settings, or places whose private and public aspects converge, such as urban business districts, street festivals, open-air markets, and even parking garages in city settings.

Table 1 shows that from a broad global perspective, private and government service organizations and providers are rarely held accountable for experiences of harassment in private, public, or mixed-space settings. The reason for this situation is twofold. First, most laws hold a service organization or provider liable to customers who experience harassment on its premises only if they can prove that the organization or provider failed to stop or prevent the harassment from occurring. Second, studies reveal that most female victims of harassment disclose the incident to informal sources, such as friends or family members, rather than formal authorities, such as owners, government officials, or the police (Fileborn, 2019). Consequently, although street harassment readily transpires in service settings, most organizations and government officials do not fully realize its prevalence.

By bringing street harassment to the marketing literature, this paper highlights not only its discriminatory impact on women but also its economic impact on commercial organizations. To build a strong economic base in which all members of society can contribute meaningfully, policy makers, especially those in developing countries, must find ways to effectively address street harassment. Nearly 40 years ago, an early investigator on the subject observed a parallel rise in socio-economic conditions for women and the phenomenon of street harassment in the United States. Explaining that harassing behavior in public spaces disempowers women and seeks to re-establish a patriarchal culture's definition of women as objects, Di Leonardo (1981, p. 55) posited that "[s]treet harassment provides a quick and dirty means of regaining male ownership of public places." At the time, she described street harassment as "a nearly fail-safe crime ... [in which] the police aren't interested anyway" (p. 51).

This may still ring true in many parts of the world, even though most people would agree that street harassment constitutes an infringement, and that because of its negative and often severe impact on the safety and freedom of its victims, it constitutes a human rights violation (e.g., Arndt, 2018; Hagerty et al., 2013). Described as a "gender-specific injury" affecting mostly women, at a minimum, street harassment can limit access to the economic marketplace for about half the population (Tuerkheimer, 1997, p. 168). Yet curbing street harassment has been a challenge for policy makers around the globe, due in part to widespread cultural tolerance, laws protecting the harasser, and the difficulty of identifying and holding accountable the responsible parties (Sweeny, 2016). Though not solving the problem of harassment, the current research begins the conversation of how service researchers can work with government and public policy officials to improve consumer welfare by correcting marketplace unfairness (Anderson et al., 2013).

1.4. Contribution

This article brings the concept of street harassment to the marketing domain by empirically showing the extent to which street harassment

Table 1

Potential legal responsibility for third-party harassment of consumers in publicly accessible service settings: A global overview.

Privately owned service settings (e.g., shopping malls, retail, hospitality, food/beverage outlets, medical offices)	Public service settings (e.g., streets, parks, bus stops, beaches, urban spaces, nature/bicycle trails)	Mixed-space service settings (e.g., urban business districts, street festivals/markets)
<p><i>Limited liability for most privately owned service organizations and service providers, only if negligence is proved</i></p> <p>Although locality-specific tort laws allow victims to sue privately owned service organizations and providers for physical and mental harm caused by third parties on their premises, private service operators are rarely held liable to patrons for the unforeseeable injurious actions of third parties. Some notable exceptions: If a service organization/provider realizes that customer harassment is occurring on its premises and fails to take steps to stop or prevent it, liability could arise under a theory of negligence. Hoteliers more are likely to be held liable for on-premise harm caused by third parties because hotel guests put their safety in the care of hoteliers. Customer incivility is illegal but rarely enforced: Many locales legally forbid individuals from engaging in, or soliciting anyone else to engage in, "lewd or dissolute conduct," covering explicit sexual comments, gestures, and solicitations in public places, including privately owned spaces. However, customers rarely seek legal retribution, and mall security policies fail to prevent C2C incivility.</p>	<p><i>Limited liability or no liability for state and local governments or public agencies</i></p> <p>No federal or national law specifically bans street harassment. The U.S. Constitution's First Amendment (by way of the Fifth Amendment) limits a state or local government's ability to enact laws that restrict a person's right to free speech. The U.S. Supreme Court has been unwilling to allow censorship of even patently offensive speech in public spaces. Some notable exceptions: Most jurisdictions deem assault (words or actions that put a person in fear of being touched, stricken, or injured by another without consent) as a stand-alone criminal misdemeanor. Enforcement is usually lax. Some states/countries have enacted local laws banning street harassment behaviors, such as stalking/following, groping, and indecent exposure (Arndt, 2018; Hagerty et al., 2013; Roenius, 2015); enforcement is lax. Failure to enforce state and local laws could lead to civil suits against the governmental entity, but lawsuits of this nature are rarely, if ever, successful.</p>	<p><i>Limited liability for most state/local governments and service providers</i></p> <p>In situations in which public property is under the control of a business (e.g., sidewalk space with outdoor café seating, produce seller's cart at a farmer's market), victims of third-party harassment might elect to sue the business and/or the governmental entity. However, absent circumstances demonstrating a specific duty to protect the patron, the likelihood of liability for either entity would be low. Some notable exceptions: Many city locales require parking lot and enclosed parking garage operators, as a condition of obtaining a business license, to submit a plan of operation that includes security measures to protect customers and their vehicles. If a parking garage customer is injured on the premises, because of a third party's harassing behavior, business operators, to which the ordinance applies, are now more likely to be held liable for the offender's conduct. However, many customers do not realize that the garage operator is liable, and open-access parking garages can claim unawareness of harassment occurring.</p>

experienced by women residing in Nepal transpires in retailing and service settings. Street harassment represents a service system failure, as police, government officials, and service organizations seem incapable or are uninvolved in protecting female consumers from experiencing harassment in public places. Furthermore, this paper explores the ways women try to limit or prevent harassment from men in public places. Next, we break new ground in the street harassment literature by exploring the extent to which Nepali men openly admit to verbally, physically, or visually harassing women in public places, including consumption settings.

Research reveals that at least 80% of women worldwide and many

men, especially homosexual and transsexual men, experience street harassment (Stop Street Harassment, 2020). The nonprofit organization, Stop Street Harassment, asserts that gender-based street harassment is a worldwide phenomenon occurring in industrialized, developing, and least developed countries. Despite its global occurrence in service settings, marketing researchers have tended to overlook its impact on consumer behavior in the marketplace. This article addresses this research void.

The outline for the rest of the article is as follows: First, we discuss street harassment and show the extent to which the concept is applicable to service researchers. Second, we explore the concept from women's perspectives by engaging in an empirical study and examine the topic of female street harassment from men's perspectives. Third, we provide a discussion of the findings. Finally, we conclude with theoretical, managerial, and social implications and research limitations.

2. Literature review

2.1. Vulnerable consumers at risk for marketplace discrimination

As previously discussed, the concept of retail discrimination is not new, as many researchers have shown that vulnerable consumers are often at risk of experiencing inferior service from retail employees (e.g., refusal of service, scowls and frowns, being followed by security personnel, inability to easily enter a retail environment; Edwards et al., 2018; Minton et al., 2017; Pittman, 2020). The concept of consumer vulnerability refers to a consumer in a temporary state of powerlessness during marketplace transactions that leads him or her to receive less value inherent in a marketplace transaction than that received by other consumers (Fisk et al., 2018).

Consumers may find themselves vulnerable during certain service encounters for a plethora of reasons, including their age, gender, civil status, class affiliation, family type, sexual orientation, religion, and physical, social, mental, or cognitive limitations; therefore, they may be susceptible to receiving less value during these encounters than other consumers. For example, Pittman (2020) found that many African American consumers view shopping as a less positive experience than other consumers because retail employees are often hesitant to serve them or instead treat them as potential shoplifting suspects. Edwards et al. (2018) noted that consumers with physical disabilities are often unable to use drive-through windows at fast-food restaurants and that many are often at risk at gasoline stations because these stations do not have enough employees to assist disabled consumers (Kaufman-Scarborough, 1998).

Regarding women's experiences with retail discrimination, marketing and legal researchers have focused almost exclusively on the propensity of organizations and sales associates to charge higher prices to women for their consumer goods than to men. For example, Jacobsen (2018, p. 242) revealed the existence of a "pink tax" or "gender tax" in which consumer goods targeted to female consumers are higher priced than similar versions targeted to male consumers. Jacobsen showed that the pink tax extends across a diverse group of consumer products, including clothing, toys, bicycles, disposable razors, shower gels, deodorants, and shampoos, and services, such as dry cleaning, haircuts, clothing alterations, and spa services (Walsh, 2009). Other researchers have shown that auto dealerships tend to charge female and African American consumers higher prices than white male consumers for identical vehicles (Edwards et al., 2018). However, this automobile pricing discrepancy issue has somewhat abated from the readily available online pricing information and automobile purchasing applications (e.g., Carvana, TrueCar; see Morton et al., 2003).

2.2. Street harassment and its young female victims

Although examples of retail discrimination against women are valid, they fail to consider that street harassment also represents a form of

discrimination that often victimizes women and other vulnerable people in public places. As discussed, street harassment describes unwanted interaction in public spaces between strangers (Kearl, 2014). Examples of street harassment include sexually explicit, racist, homophobic, or other racist comments; negative comments about appearance, sexuality, or accent; leering and vulgar gestures; genital exposure; sexual touching or grabbing; pubic masturbation; whistling, barking, or kissing noises; and threats to remove an article of clothing, such as a hijab (Hollaback, n.d.; Lennox and Jurdi-Hage, 2017).

Street harassment represents a global problem. For example, 65% of women in the United States have reported experiencing at least one type of street harassment in their lifetime. More than half (57%) of all U.S. women report that they have experienced verbal harassment, while 41% have experienced physically aggressive forms of harassment, including sexual touching (23%), following (20%), flashing (14%), and being forced to do something sexual (9%) (Hollaback, n.d.; Kearl, 2014). At a global level, Chemaly (2015) documented that more than 50% of women in 22 countries have reported being fondled or groped in public places. Furthermore, street harassment is especially prevalent among women who live in developing countries such as India (Vera-Gray, 2016), Egypt (Amar, 2011), Bangladesh (Nahar et al., 2013), and Nepal (Neupane and Chesney-Lind, 2014). Women report often being harassed in public spaces, especially on public transport (Chesney-Lind, 2013), with the insensitivity of the police and a low conviction rate of harassers providing men with an “overarching culture of impunity” (Dhillon and Bakaya, 2014, p. 1).

The history of street harassment is often linked to female social status and career advancement. For example, unaccompanied middle-class women in Victorian England experienced street harassment when they entered city centers to engage in leisure activities, such as shopping, as did a new class of female employees, typically office assistants and clerks, when they entered city centers for employment purposes (Wolkowitz, 1998). Similarly, Chesney-Lind (2013) noted that while women residing in fast-growing developing countries are benefiting from educational and occupational opportunities, these opportunities and freedom of mobility come at a cost—the risk of street harassment.

Women who enter public spaces unaccompanied remain vulnerable to various forms of harassment, including verbal insults and physical touching. This is especially true for women living in developing countries, such as Bangladesh (Alam et al., 2010) and Colombia (Tolton, 2014), as police, government officials, and the courts often ignore the impact of street harassment on women’s well-being. As such, street harassment is often a tolerated occurrence, despite its ill-effects (Kearl, 2014).

As previously noted, marketing academics have tended to overlook street harassment as a service issue. Yet social scientists’ investigations of the existence or prevalence of street harassment and its impact on well-being reveal that women and other vulnerable consumers (e.g., homosexuals) often experience street harassment in places such as clubs/bars, restaurants (Mellgren et al., 2018), shopping areas, public transportation (Bastomski and Smith, 2017; Leach and Sitaram, 2007), taxis (Bowman, 1993), movie theaters (Lahsaeizadeh and Yousefinejad, 2012), malls (Peoples, 2008), recreational places (e.g., Kearl, 2014), and even on social networking websites (Khurana et al., 2015) and YouTube (Wotanis and McMillan, 2014).

2.3. Tolerating street harassment around the globe

Despite being so widespread, “the real issue with street harassment laws within the United States is that they do not exist” (Arndt, 2018, p. 89); indeed, street harassment throughout the world is generally tolerated by government and public policy officials. For example, unlike harassment in the workplace and educational settings, which constitutes unlawful discrimination under the Civil Rights Act of 1964, street harassment in public spaces is not specifically outlawed in the United States.

While some U.S. states and municipalities have enacted local laws addressing elements of the problem, most jurisdictions have only banned common street harassment behaviors, such as stalking/following, groping, and indecent exposure (Arndt, 2018; Hagerty et al., 2013; Roenius, 2015). Among other types of street harassment, some states recognize assault (i.e., words or actions that put a person in fear of being touched, stricken, or injured by another without consent) as a stand-alone criminal misdemeanor (e.g., Alaska, Illinois, Idaho). Despite these apparent protections and because of the transient nature of the interaction, processing charges under local laws or alleged assault without proof of physical behavior is difficult (Tran, 2015).

Outside the United States, several governments recognize the negative impact of street harassment on both individual rights and economic growth and have begun drafting policy to address the problem. In 2017, the European Parliament (2017, pp. 194, 196), “[s]trongly condemn[ing] forms of sexual violence and physical or psychological harassment and deplor[ing] the fact that these acts are too easily tolerated,” insisted on stronger enforcement of existing laws in the European Union and called on its Commission and member states to criminalize harms against women and girls, including “any form of unwanted verbal, non-verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature ... with the purpose or effect of violating the dignity of a person.” The next year, France enacted legislation specifically banning street harassment, including sexist insults, degrading comments, and offensive sex-related behavior, toward others in a public place. Punishable by immediate fines of up to €750 (US \$850), law enforcement personnel issued hundreds of fines within the first several months of the law’s effective date (Guardian, 2018). Portugal and Belgium have similar legislation in place, which also includes potential jail time. Despite these illustrative laws and regulations, most street harassment in the rest of the world is not covered by specific legislation.

When introducing the 2019 World Economic Situation and Prospects report, Secretary-General of the United Nations António Guterres underscored the goal of building “a peaceful, prosperous future in which no one is left behind” (United Nations, 2019, p. xv). Recognizing the challenges in achieving such a lofty goal, the report confirms that “[u]rgent and concrete policy action is needed” to secure stable economic growth, and it calls for lawmakers to adopt a “cooperative and long-term approach to global policymaking in key areas, including ... redressing inequality” (United Nations, 2019, p. xvii). In support of that objective, most experts agree that laws intended to curb street harassment should “(1) serve as a deterrent to street harassers; (2) provide street harassment victims with adequate legal remedies; and (3) protect victims’ fundamental liberty rights of mobility and bodily integrity” (Roenius, 2015, p. 834). Although many countries might agree with the report, how to craft such policy has received little consensus.

Similar to government and public policy officials who have tended to overlook the severity of street harassment, marketing researchers have not been attentive enough to the idea that street harassment is a form of retail discrimination and negative C2C interaction. As such, marketing academics should expand their inquiry into investigating street harassment from consumers’ perspectives to understand its impact on consumer welfare. In the following sections, we take first steps to investigate street harassment as a type of marketplace harassment.

3. Research focus and study context

As previously discussed, social scientists have explored street harassment from a gendered perspective, with many investigations viewing the phenomenon from the lens of male dominance with the goal to maintain an existing gender hierarchy (Henry, 2017); as a form of sexual terrorism perpetrated against vulnerable groups, especially women and homosexual men (Fogg-Davis, 2006; Logan, 2015); or as the reluctance of patriarchal societies to address the abuse and exploitation of women in public (Leach and Sitaram, 2007). Although these perspectives are valid, they fail to consider street harassment as a type of

marketplace discrimination or negative interaction that affects consumers' experiences and consumption behaviors. In addition, because marketers view value as being created or destroyed between two social entities, this paper will also aim to understand a harasser's perspective of the situation.

Although both genders are susceptible to street harassment (Kearl, 2014), the phenomenon mostly prevails among women and other vulnerable groups such as homosexuals and transgender individuals (Logan, 2015). Girls as young as elementary school age report being victims of harassment, typically on public transport, which many men in developing countries perceive as a male-dominant space (Dunckel-Graglia, 2013). Thus, our research investigates the prevalence of harassment experienced by women from men in service contexts and also explores the issue from a male perspective, or the extent to which men participate in harassing women in service settings.

The context of our investigation is Nepal. Violence against women in public spaces represents a serious global problem, but it is especially prevalent among Nepali women (Taylor, 2011). Investigations reveal that Nepali women are extremely susceptible to male harassment while using public transportation services and that most Nepali women will experience some type of harassment (i.e., verbal, non-verbal, or physical) during their lifetime while traveling (Gautam et al., 2019; Neupane and Chesney-Lind, 2014) either to college or to a place of employment (Mishra and Lamichhane, 2018).

Nepal has only recently begun addressing issues involving sexual harassment. Under its earliest legislation, the Muluki Ain's "Chapter on Acts Done with Sexual Intent" notes that sexual harassment, which does not appear to cover most street harassment behaviors, is punishable by fines of up to Rs 10,000 (US\$87) and one-year imprisonment (Pioneer Law Associates, 2016). In 2015, the Sexual Harassment at Workplace Prevention Act banned sexual harassment in government and private workplaces. Broadly protecting employees, contract workers, customers, and business guests, the act is gender neutral. Among other things, it prohibits verbal and non-verbal expressions of sexual motives, proposals or demands for sexual favors, and flirting or harassing with a sexual motive in the workplace. Fines of up to Rs 50,000 (US\$435) apply to both employees who commit such acts and employers who repeatedly fail to take responsive actions, and in addition to providing victim compensation, harassers may face up to six months in jail (Pioneer Law Associates, 2016). A fair reading of this statute could find employers, such as construction companies, potentially liable for failing to rectify street harassment committed by their employees on the job.

In 2017, the Nepali police launched an emergency helpline for victims of sexual harassment on public transportation in Kathmandu Valley. Although early reports suggest that the tool has been extremely effective in curbing the offense on buses, broader legislation and enforcement policies are clearly required, as many Nepali women are still being harassed every day in public (Spotlight, 2017).

4. Study 1: Street harassment against women in retailing and service settings

4.1. Survey procedure and methodology

Two of the study's authors and 10 graduate students enrolled in a graduate business program intercepted 300 female consumers present in a Kathmandu shopping complex. Of the 214 women who agreed to participate, 66 (31%) were 16–20 years of age, 90 (42%) were 21–25 years of age, 28 (13%) were 26–30 years of age, and 30 (14%) were 31 years of age and older. Respondents were asked to complete a questionnaire in the Nepali language, which we designed using the back-translation method (McGorry, 2000).

The back-translation method entailed three procedures. First, we created an English version of the questionnaire and had it translated into the Nepali language by two independent bilingual individuals. We compared the Nepali with the English version for inconsistencies,

mistranslations, meaning, cultural gaps, and/or dropped words. Second, two other independent bilingual individuals back-translated the questionnaires into English. Third, the English version was again translated into the Nepali language to further address inconsistencies, mistranslations, meaning, cultural gaps, and/or dropped words to ensure accurate interpretation. The questionnaire administrators were native Nepali speakers and proficient in English.

To ensure that all respondents understood the concept of harassment in the same way, the questionnaire defined it as "unwanted comments, gestures, and actions forced on strangers in a public place without their consent and ... directed at them because of their actual or perceived sex, gender, gender expression, or sexual orientation." The goal of the questionnaire items was to uncover the extent to which Nepali women have experienced various forms of harassment (i.e., verbal, physical, or visual) from men when in settings such as buses, shopping areas, movie theaters, restaurants and so forth. In addition, the questionnaire probed when the female respondents experienced harassment (e.g., time of day), the impact of harassment on their emotions, and measures they take when entering the marketplace to lower their risks of being victimized.

4.2. Results

Two hundred (92%) respondents reported that they have observed examples of street harassment in Nepal by men aimed at women. Furthermore, 131 (60%) respondents reported being harassed by men in a public place within the past year. As Table 2 shows, among women who have experienced harassment within the past year, 56 (43%) experienced it on a micro-bus, 54 (41%) in a market, 53 (41%) on a regular bus, 47 (36%) at a bus stop, and 30 (23%) on a mini-bus. Significantly fewer women reported being harassed in a public park, tuk-tuk (i.e., three-wheeled motorized taxi), shopping mall, movie theater, bar, temple, restaurant, regular taxi, or public hospital.

Regarding the types of harassment Nepali women experienced in public places, of the 131 respondents who experienced harassment within the past year, 107 (82%) reported being victims of verbal harassment, which the questionnaire defined as "comments, whistling, and things like this." Seventy-seven (59%) respondents who also reported experiencing harassment within the past year were victims of physical harassment, defined as men "touching or feeling your body without your consent." Lastly, 82 (63%) of the harassed respondents reported being victims of visual harassment, defined as "men staring at you, giving you odd looks, or exposing their genitals to you."

The results further reveal that harassment tends to be stranger-to-customer, as 127 (97%) of the 131 respondents who reported being harassed within the past year indicated harassment by an unknown person while 26 (20%) reported harassment by a familiar person. In addition, 20 (15%) respondents reported being victimized in the morning, 90 (69%) in the afternoon, 79% (60%) in the early evening,

Table 2
Retailing and service locations where women experience harassment from men.

Settings	% agreement among female victims (N = 131)
Micro-bus	56 (43%)
Public market	54 (41%)
Bus	53 (41%)
Bus stop	47 (36%)
Minibus	30 (23%)
Public park	13 (10%)
Tuk-tuk	10 (8%)
Shopping mall	9 (7%)
Movie theater	6 (5%)
Mar	6 (5%)
Temple	6 (5%)
Restaurant	3 (2%)
Taxi	2 (2%)
Public hospital	1 (1%)

and 29 (22%) in the late evening. Thus, consumers are experiencing harassment in retailing and service settings during peak business hours, when these operations are typically fully staffed and bustling with customers.

Regarding the impact of harassment on victims, 110 (84%) of the 131 respondents who reported being harassed within the past year indicated that they felt angry as a result of the event. In addition, 64 (49%) reported that they felt scared, 59 (45%) humiliated, 32 (24%) traumatized, and 25 (19%) degraded. As the findings reveal, victims in retailing and service settings may respond to street harassment by being cautious or fearful of entering public places. Gardner (1995, p. 2) argues that the fear of street harassment follows women and those in other disadvantaged social categories in public places, as “routine [distress] will be experienced with knowledge of what *can* occur.”

To explore the impact of street harassment on female victims and non-victims, the questionnaire also noted, “Many women often take precautionary measures to ensure their safety. Please check all the precautions that you take or that your family asks you to take for your safety as a woman.” Among the 131 respondents who reported being harassed within the past year, 84 (64%) noted that they avoid going out after dark as a precautionary measure against street harassment, and 56 (43%) avoid wearing certain clothes. Furthermore, 30 (23%) reported that they avoid taking buses, and 27 (21%) avoid shopping areas and taxis. Twenty-four (18%) also refrain from patronizing certain restaurants, 19 (15%) avoid movie theaters, and 9 (7%) avoid taking tuk-tuks.

Of the 83 female respondents who had never experienced street harassment, many still take precautionary measures when entering public places or avoid them altogether. As Table 3 shows, 19 (23%) avoid certain restaurants, 17 (21%) avoid going to the park, 14 (17%) avoid certain shopping areas, and 13 (16%) avoid taking buses or going to movie theaters as ways to ensure their safety. These findings indicate that the knowledge of what could occur (Gardner, 1995) is a powerful impediment to Nepali women’s abilities to freely enter, patronize, and enjoy many retailing and consumer settings. Overall, these findings indicate that street harassment is a form of marketplace discrimination that promotes the exclusion of women from these settings.

Although social scientists have investigated the psychological and emotional impact of street harassment on victims (Vera-Gray, 2016), considerably less is known about male harassers and their willingness to engage in verbal, physical, or visual harassment against women in public settings (Henry, 2017). Some researchers have shown that male harassers rationalize this deviant behavior as their religious right, which includes punishing women for taking on professional work, wearing certain clothing, or viewing women as sexual objects who exist to please men (Henry, 2017). Researchers have also shown that male harassers

often believe that their behavior toward women is justified, in that they have a “sense of heterosexual patriarchal obligation” to “[protect] “civilization” by making women’s public experience uncomfortable and unsafe (Logan, 2015, p. 204).

Currently, knowledge of the precise public places that male harassers victimize women from their own perspectives is lacking. Study 2 addresses this research void by uncovering specific retailing and service settings in which men have not only witnessed harassment against women but have also engaged in such behavior.

5. Study 2: Street harassment in retailing and service settings from the male perspective

5.1. Survey procedure and methodology

Similar to Study1, two of the authors and 10 graduate students enrolled in a graduate business program intercepted 300 male consumers present in a Kathmandu shopping complex, with 219 agreeing to participate. Of the 217 respondents who provided their age, 26 (12%) were 16–20 years of age, 74 (34%) were 21–25 years of age, 35 (26%) were 26–30 years of age, 32 (15%) were 31–35 years of age, and 50 (23%) were 36 years of age and older. The respondents were asked to complete a questionnaire designed using the back-translation method (McGorry, 2000) as described in Study 1.

To ensure that all the respondents understood the concept of harassment in the same way, the questionnaire defined it as in Study 1. Examples of street harassment included unwanted whistling and leering; sexist, homophobic, or transphobic slurs; persistent requests for someone’s name, number, or destination; sexual names, comments, and demands; following or flashing; public masturbation; groping; sexual assault; and rape.

5.2. Results

One hundred sixty-nine (77%) respondents reported that they had witnessed examples of street harassment in Nepal by men against women in many retailing and service settings, though most commonly in transportation services (see Table 4). For example, 62 (28%) respondents reported witnessing harassment against women on micro-buses, 58 (27%) on regular buses, 37 (17%) at a bus stop, 32 (15%) on a minibus, and 30 (14%) on a tuk-tuk. In addition, they reported noticing street harassment against women in settings such as public parks (22%), restaurants (17%), and movie theaters (15%). Considerably fewer men (2%) reported witnessing harassment against women in a market than female respondents (41%). This finding may stem from men spending considerably less time in markets than women.

One hundred sixty-one (74%) respondents reported having observed

Table 3
Precautionary measures that women take to ensure their safety in public.

Measures	% agreement among female victims (N = 131)	% agreement among female non-victims (N = 83)
Avoid going out after dark	84 (64%)	41 (49%)
Avoid wearing certain clothes	56 (43%)	28 (34%)
Avoid going out alone	37 (28%)	40 (48%)
Carry items such as pepper spray or safety pins	34 (26%)	13 (16%)
Avoid taking buses	30 (23%)	13 (16%)
Avoid certain shopping areas	27 (21%)	14 (17%)
Avoid taking taxis	27 (21%)	11 (13%)
Avoid certain restaurants	24 (18%)	19 (23%)
Avoid going to parks	23 (18%)	17 (21%)
Avoid going to movie theaters	19 (15%)	13 (16%)
Avoid taking tuk-tuks	9 (7%)	9 (11%)

Table 4
Retailing and service locations where men have witnessed women being harassed by other men.

Settings	% of men reporting yes	% of men reporting no
Micro-bus	62 (28%)	157 (72%)
Bus	58 (27%)	161 (27%)
Public park	47 (22%)	172 (79%)
Restaurant	38 (17%)	181 (83%)
Bus stop	37 (17%)	182 (83%)
Minibus	32 (15%)	187 (85%)
Movie theater	32 (15%)	187 (85%)
Tuk-tuk	30 (14%)	189 (86%)
Temple	21 (10%)	198 (90%)
Shopping mall	16 (7%)	203 (93%)
Taxi	9 (4%)	210 (96%)
Public hospital	6 (3%)	213 (97%)
Public market	4 (2%)	215 (98%)
Bar	0 (0%)	219 (100%)

women being verbally harassed (i.e., comments, whistling) by other men, 98 (45%) reported witnessing physical harassment (i.e., touching or feeling the victims without consent), and 61 (28%) reported observing other men visually harass women (i.e., staring, giving odd looks, or showing genitals). When asked whether they had ever intentionally harassed a woman in public, 47 (22%) indicated that they had. Among these harassers, 31 (66%) reported having verbally harassed a woman in a public place, 9 (19%) admitted to engaging in physical harassment, and 8 (17%) admitted to engaging in visual harassment. Of note, more than 20% of the male respondents willingly admitted to engaging in some form of harassment against women, including an intention to intimidate, shame, terrorize, control, or assault their targets within retailing and service settings.

The male respondents also indicated their agreement with a list of precautionary measures that women can take to reduce the risk of being harassed in public. Table 5 shows the percentage of men, classified by those who admit to being harassers and those who do not, who agreed that specific measures can help women avoid experiencing street harassment. Among the 47 male harassers, 31 (66%) suggested that women avoid “going out after dark,” and 21 (45%) noted that women should avoid “wearing certain clothes.” This finding lends support to studies showing that male harassers often rationalize their actions by blaming women who wear clothing that they subjectively perceive as provocative or unprofessional, indicating an active subjugation of women and the existing patriarchal hierarchy (Fairchild, 2015).

Table 5 also provides insight that, although women may visit retailers and service establishments, the fear of harassment will always exist. In this vein, 19 (40%) male harassers reported that women should avoid “patronizing certain restaurants” as a means to reduce the chance of experiencing street harassment, 11 (23%) noted that women should avoid “certain shopping areas,” 10 (21%) believed women should avoid “going to parks,” and other harassers indicated that women should avoid “taking buses,” “going to movie theaters,” and “taking tuk-tuks.” These views of harassers were similarly shared by male non-harassers. From a male perspective, Nepali women should clearly engage in place avoidance (Relph, 1976) to prevent becoming victims of male street harassment.

6. Discussion

Although many service researchers have explored the positive aspects of C2C interactions in physical and virtual commercial and non-commercial service settings (e.g., Harris and Baron, 2004; Zeithaml et al., 2018), considerably fewer researchers have explored negative experiences from other customers and unacquainted strangers

Table 5
Precautionary measures that men believe women should take to ensure their safety in public.

Measures	% agreement among male harassers (N = 47)	% agreement among male non-harassers (N = 172)
Avoid going out after dark	31 (66%)	108 (63%)
Avoid wearing certain clothes	21 (45%)	78 (45%)
Avoid certain restaurants	19 (40%)	47 (27%)
Avoid certain shopping areas	11 (23%)	46 (27%)
Avoid going to parks	10 (21%)	30 (17%)
Avoid taking buses	9 (20%)	24 (14%)
Avoid going to movie theaters	7 (15%)	24 (14%)
Carry items such as pepper spray or safety pins	4 (9%)	21 (12%)
Avoid going out alone	3 (6%)	20 (12%)
Avoid taking tuk-tuks	3 (6%)	10 (6%)
Avoid taking taxis	2 (4%)	9 (5%)

(Fombelle et al., 2019; Nicholls, 2010). The reason for this research void may be that while managers can encourage C2C interactions by modifying consumption settings (e.g., furniture, open spaces, entertainment) or by encouraging the formation of social or online customer communities (Libai et al., 2010), they are mostly powerless to stop negative C2C interactions that occur for brief moments (Colm et al., 2017).

Street harassment, which describes unwanted interactions in public spaces between strangers and makes the victim feel annoyed, angry, humiliated, or scared, is a global problem occurring in many retailing and service settings, including: stores, public transportation, movie theaters, and recreational areas (Kearl, 2014). Despite its global prevalence, street harassment has been an overlooked subject in the marketing discipline. This research represents a first attempt to address this research void and to better understand the impact of harassment on consumers' attitudes and behaviors.

As the results show, 60% of Nepali women have experienced verbal, physical, or visual harassment by men in public over the course of a year. Furthermore, the results reveal that more than 20% of Nepali men acknowledge being harassers. More importantly, Nepali men, both harassers and non-harassers, acknowledge that women should refrain from entering certain service settings to avoid being victimized. Street harassment is clearly a service issue because it causes consumers, such as younger women, to experience emotional and psychological discomfort (e.g., anger, humiliation); it is also often the precursor to more violent actions, including rape and murder (Logan, 2015).

6.1. Theoretical implications

As previously discussed, service researchers have been attuned to the fact that service customers are often profoundly impacted by the presence of other customers in shared consumption settings and that often other customers are the source of customers' negative service experiences (Colm et al., 2017; Grove and Fisk, 1997). This work buttresses this research by not only showing how young girls' experiences in public settings is often negatively impacted by the presence of males in shared settings, but it also demonstrates the extent to which perpetrators readily admit to participating in overt and covert forms of verbal and physical harm to females present in shared consumption settings. Although the marketplace may afford consumers opportunities to engage in exchanges that result in human togetherness, they also afford opportunities for others to engage in exchanges that ruin others' service experiences.

Street harassment is a type of retail discrimination that warrants theoretical and managerial investigations. For example, researchers might expand on the social servicescape paradigm (Tombs and McColl-Kennedy, 2003) by exploring how actual or anticipated negative social encounters with others present in consumption settings influence consumers' approach or avoidance behaviors. Many consumers may now be turning to online venues as a means to reduce the risk of experiencing consequences associated with negative social interactions in public places, such as enclosed shopping malls.

For too long, marketers have primarily viewed retailing and service establishments as geographic points of distribution, with the concept of place being considered “a mere subdivision of universal space, inert, and homogeneous” (Sherry, 2000, p. 274). Cultural geographers often view places as being profound centers of human existence to which people may feel a sense of either insideness, such as feelings of attachment, involvement, or concern for a place, or outsideness, such as feelings of strangeness or alienation (Freestone and Liu, 2016; Relph, 1976). We encourage service researchers to explore the impact of street harassment on consumers' sense of place insideness or outsideness, as the fear of harassment may cause consumers to become estranged from the marketplace and miss out on many of the pleasures related to marketplace consumption.

6.2. Managerial implications

Service firms might consider exploring the impact of purposeful segregation of women in at-risk service settings, such as transportation and restaurants, and testing whether female-only services (e.g., “pink transportation”; [Dunckel-Graglia, 2013](#), p. 98) can reduce women’s risk of harassment. To date, pink segregation has primarily been limited to transportation services in developing countries (e.g., Mexico, [Dunckel-Graglia, 2013](#); Papua New Guinea, [Nawaz, 2018](#)) and in areas in which government officials tend to overlook or are unable to address the plight of women in public services. This does not mean that pink transportation is a panacea for female street harassment. For example, despite the popularity of gender-segregated buses in both Mexico and India, women often complain that segregated services are too infrequent, while attempts to employ gender-segregated subway cars failed in South Korea, Indonesia, and Brazil because male passengers would often ignore the restrictions during rush-hour commutes ([Shah, 2018](#)).

Although the concept of service segregation is controversial, it may be warranted given the contemporary realities of marketplace violence. For example, as mentioned, street harassment often plagues not only women but also members of stigmatized groups, including lesbians, effeminate men, homosexual men, Orthodox Jews, and so on ([Leibovitz, 2019](#); [Logan, 2015](#)). In response, service organizations could consider offering services to members of stigmatized groups during certain operating hours. Indeed, to help prevent the spread of the coronavirus, several retailers have reserved shopping times, such as early in the day, for vulnerable customers, such as the elderly and those with compromised immune systems ([Umoh, 2020](#)). In the future, the definition of vulnerable customers may be expanded to include consumers who feel unsafe during traditional operating hours.

Yet, as research reveals, most people believe that the best way to prevent street harassment is not necessarily through segregation but by putting more security cameras, law enforcement officials, or neighborhood watch groups in public spaces ([Kearl, 2014](#)). The reality, however, is that video surveillance cameras in private and public service settings often fail to stop perpetrators of harassment and violence because surveillance operators typically arrive too late to stop the crime or are not closely monitoring all the cameras ([Koskela, 2002](#)). In some situations, video surveillance cameras in shopping malls may even be used not to protect women from violence during shopping but to ensure they are prescribing to socio-cultural norms (e.g., modesty) ([Alhadar and McCahill, 2011](#)). Some shopping malls are beginning to use humanoid robotic devices to assist security personnel with monitoring capabilities ([Loke, 2018](#)). Perhaps these robotic devices will provide shoppers with a sense of security and discourage prospective harassers from harming others.

Considering the cultural embeddedness of street harassment, it is doubtful that the problem will dissipate any time soon. As such, we encourage consumer goods companies to consider direct selling as a viable distribution channel in developing countries, especially those where mail delivery and technology services are unreliable or unavailable. Direct selling, which refers to a sales channel without a fixed retail location, is built on the premise of leveraging an individual’s social networks to generate business ([Ferrell and Ferrell, 2012](#)). Direct selling may be a viable means for consumer goods manufacturers to optimize their reach to female consumers, who may purposefully avoid public places because of risks associated with street harassment. In locales with reliable mail delivery or good technology services, female shoppers or any consumer fearing harassment may turn to e-commerce or to using buy-online-pick-up-at-store options to help limit or prevent harassment in the marketplace ([Edwards et al., 2018](#)).

6.3. Societal implications

Many commentators and organizations have called for criminalization of street harassment (e.g., [Arndt, 2018](#); [Hagerty et al., 2013](#); [Olney,](#)

[2015](#)). Labeling street harassment as a “form of gender-based sexual violence with observable physical, psychological, and social harms,” [Olney \(2015, p. 138\)](#) suggests that criminal law holds the most promise for reducing street harassment and notes that current criminal laws are inadequate to remedy the harms suffered by victims. Lkening the resistance among today’s lawmakers to a bygone era’s sentiments about domestic violence being beyond the purview of state intervention, [Tran \(2015\)](#) similarly argues that the harm and widespread nature of street harassment warrant criminalization. Criminalization, though not without potential concerns, seems to be a reasonable approach, particularly in terms of deterrence and holding the actual offender, as opposed to a business owner, liable for the injurious conduct.

[Bowman \(1993\)](#), an early commentator on the issue of street harassment, proposed a model law that would treat street harassment as a misdemeanor, punishable by a fine. However, [Arndt \(2018\)](#) argues that to pass U.S. constitutional muster, criminalizing only the more severe forms of street harassment would be advisable. Instead, she proposes a model law, titled “Public sexual assault,” for an aggravated misdemeanor that “targets a specific person [the harasser] in a public space, using words or actions upon the harasser that are explicitly or implicitly sexual, which ... naturally tend to provoke violent resentment ... or ... with the result of the harasser fearing for his or her own safety” (p. 97). Notably, Kansas City’s Ordinance No. 140777 (code art. VI, § 50), passed by unanimous vote, in part forbids shouting, honking, and making unusual noises or threats for the purpose of intimidating or injuring a pedestrian, runner, or bicyclist, with punishment of up to a \$500 fine and 180 days in jail. We consider this a model for other public entities to adopt to begin reducing harassment in the marketplace.

6.4. Research limitations

This work is limited to exploring the impact of harassment experienced by women from men who reside in Nepal. Although this exploratory work sets the foundation for future studies, a further understanding of the impact of actual or potential harassment is warranted. This work contributes to the literature by revealing the extent to which harassment exists in service systems and how it affects the lives of women residing in a least developed country. Perhaps less clear is the extent to which a country’s economy is harmed by street harassment, as consumers and even employees may avoid the marketplace out of fear of being harassed. Street harassment constitutes marketplace unfairness ([Fisk et al., 2018](#)) linked to access to services, systemic bias, customer vulnerability, and discrimination. The time is ripe for marketing researchers to consider how verbal, physical, and visual harassment taints consumers’ marketplace experiences.

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